



Turkey-EU Relations After the European Summit Meeting: A Historical Decision and a First Step to a Final Destination

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Theme: The European Union has finally decided to hold membership negotiations with Turkey, scheduled to start on October 3, 2005.

Summary: The EU Commission and the EU's leaders are now persuaded that Turkey has made sufficient progress on fulfilling the so-called 'Copenhagen Political criteria' regarding democracy, human rights and legal reforms. The European Parliament adopted the resolution for the opening of negotiations with Turkey on December 15, 2004.

It has been a long road for Turkey, which first applied for full membership in 1959 and then signed an association agreement with the former EEC in 1963 with the object of becoming a member of the club in the foreseeable future. In 1989 the application for full membership was formally turned down. As outlined in the association agreement, Turkey entered the Customs Union in 1996 but without becoming a full member of the EU. Subsequently, Turkey was declared a candidate for entry at the EU summit meeting in Helsinki in 1999. It was agreed that 'Turkey was a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states' and concluded that 'if Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay'.

Analysis: The European Union has finally decided to hold membership negotiations with Turkey, scheduled to start on October 3, 2005. Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has said the episode a 'bitter pill' to swallow for Europe's 25 heads of government. As was promised by European leaders at the 2002 Copenhagen summit meeting, the EU-25 has unanimously agreed to open accession negotiations with Turkey, based on the 'The Progress Report on Turkey 2004' and the Commission's October 6, 2004, recommendations.

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As the BBC reported on 18 December, 'there is little delight in Europe's newspapers at the prospect of Turkish membership of the EU... A handful of papers welcome Turkey as a source of moderate Islam the EU should embrace.' On the other hand, many Turkish newspapers were optimistic for the future and celebrated the start of membership talks as a great success for the current government. The EU's decision was regarded as momentous for the 21st Century as the Yalta Conference during the Second World War was for the 20th.

One of *Hurriyet's* leading columnists, Okyay Eksi, describes and reflects on the feeling shared by many Turks: '...What concerned us when we decided to start the negotiations? That it could not be at the cost of our honour, by saying "yes" to offers that will transform the Turkish entity in Cyprus into a minority or by accepting the status of a second class member of the EU, but only on condition that we sit at the table with our honour intact and that we negotiate under equal conditions.'

In the subsequent public debate in Turkey, both the press and politicians began to discuss the wording of the final declaration in order to understand where Turkey really stands and what the main obstacles and pre-conditions are for full membership of the EU. After all, the view in Turkey is that this is a 'conditional offer' of membership and that it entails 'tough conditions', as described by the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. The Swedish Primer Minister concurred: 'Turkey must decide whether she wants to become a member. We can invite Turkey, but we ask for compliance with certain conditions' (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 17, 2004).

The Presidency's conclusion coincides with the opinions of the EU Commissioners mentioned in the last progress report on Turkey. As expected, the European Council and European Parliament have followed the recommendations of the EU Commission.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the summit declaration:

- (1) The most important result is that Turkey has obtained a fixed date for starting membership negotiations: October 3, 2005.
- (2) Membership talks will be an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand. If the negotiations fail for any reason, the candidate state must remain "fully anchored in the European structures through strongest possible bond". The arising question is: What would happen, if Turkey would complete all negotiations process successfully, but it will be not accepted as a full member after 10 or 15 years, what ever the reasons are. In other words, Turkey will be ready for membership but the EU is not. Wording in the text gives the impression that the EU keeps the door open for "privilege partnership", when the final decision must be taken after 10 or 15 years.
- (3) Until now the EU has assumed that a candidate state would enter once it was able to take up all the obligations of membership. In this respect Turkey will be not treated on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states.

- (4) For the first time the EU has explicitly stated that it will suspend negotiations 'in the case of a serious and persistent breach in a candidate state of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect of human rights and fundamental reforms and the rule of law on which the union is founded'. As BBC correspondent Chris Morris has highlighted, 'negotiations on joining the EU are not really negotiations at all. They are dictations of terms'. However, it should be borne in mind that so far no country which has initiated membership talks has ever been rejected by the EU.
- (5) The EU has warned Turkey that the 'financial aspects of accession of a candidate state must be allowed for in the applicable Financial Framework. Hence, accession negotiations yet to be opened with candidates whose accession could have substantial financial consequences can only be concluded after the establishment of the Financial Framework for the period from 2014 together with possible consequential financial reforms.' In other words, Turkey cannot become a full member of the EU before 2014, even in the event of accession negotiations having been successfully completed.
- (6) The EU can consider long transition periods, derogations or safeguard clauses that would be permanently available for sensitive or costly areas such as the free movement of persons, regional subsidies and agriculture. However, these restrictions, to extend many years after joining, could prepare the ground for a 'special partnership' rather than full membership.
- (7) Although not a formal precondition to starting membership talks, Cyprus was the most sensitive issue at the summit. The EU wanted Ankara to sign a protocol to update Turkey's association agreement to cover the ten newest EU member states. The Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said that this is 'not what you can call a formal legal recognition, but it is a step that leads to progress in this field'. For many, however, this would have amounted to a *de facto* recognition of the Greek Republic of Cyprus. Mr Tassos Papadopoulos warned that the protocol to the agreement –that covers the free movement of persons and goods– must be signed and implemented. 'If they don't do it, they simply don't start negotiations'. It is obvious that Nicosia can exercise its veto to block entry talks at every step of the way to membership, because EU accession talks involve the candidate country negotiating with each government. The substance of the negotiations will be conducted at an Intergovernmental Conference with the participation of all member states on the one hand and the candidate state on the other and decisions must be taken unanimously. Hence, the handicap Turkey is now facing is how it can negotiate entry terms with the 25 EU governments without recognising one of them. At the summit meeting the 'Cyprus Issue' was postponed until the actual start of negotiations on October 3, 2005.
- (8) Another crucial point on the agenda is Turkey's relation with Greece regarding territorial disputes in the Aegean Sea. The European Council 'reaffirmed its view that unresolved disputes having repercussions on the accession process should if necessary be brought to the International Court of Justice for settlement'.

By paving the way for Turkey's eventual membership of the EU, the European leaders meeting in Brussels brought Turkey a step closer to realising one of its most cherished dreams. With this historical decision Turkey's right to belong to the 'European family' has been confirmed through its participation in the enlargement process. The hope is that

Turkey will gain full recognition as a member of the European family once the accession negotiations are completed.

But we all know that a long road lies before us and that it is full of surprises, uncertainties and political and economic obstacles.

Three factors seem to be essential for the full integration of Turkey into the Union:

- (1) As recommended by The Progress Report 2004, future EU-Turkey relations should be based on three requirements. The first is the continued cooperation to reinforce and support the reform process in Turkey, particularly as regards the fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria. The second involves the fulfilment of the specific conditions for the conduct of the accession negotiations. The third is a substantially strengthened political and cultural dialogue between the EU Member States and Turkey. The Turkish government will have to swiftly put its own house in order and continue to enforce and promote its restructuring, modernisation and democratisation policies. France's *Le Monde* describes the situation as follows: '... one of the main virtues of the European is to encourage applicants to reform, to modernise themselves, to respect the rights of minorities, to break with hegemonist temptations. There is no reason why this educational virtue should not work with the Turks. For them the choice is very clear: if they meet the conditions set by the EU, they will become a full member in 10 or 15 years. It is now up to them to seize this opportunity.'
- (2) In the short term the Cyprus issue seems to be the main hindrance to the opening of Turkey's negotiations with the EU. On April 24, 2004, northern and southern Cypriots voted in a referendum to decide on the Annan Plan, which was aimed at the reunification of the island and joint entry into the EU. Surprisingly, the Turkish part of Cyprus voted in favour of the Annan Plan and a united Cyprus. The Greek part of the island, however, voted against and entered the EU as a full member, representing Cyprus as a whole. As a result, the Cyprus issue remains unsolved. One of the EU's main mistakes was to accept the Greek part of Cyprus as a full member of the EU while not achieving a definitive solution to partition. In other words, the European Union has become the prisoner of its own politics. As long as the Greek part of Cyprus is a full member of the EU, the latter is unlikely to make any contribution to resolving and enforcing the Annan Plan. If there is no international pressure, especially from the United States, on the Greek part of Cyprus, Nicosia will certainly not give up its currently advantageous position. Only the United States and, perhaps, the United Kingdom can encourage Greek Cypriots to accept the Annan Plan by improving their economic and political relations with Northern Cyprus without any official recognition, as Washington did with the Republic of Macedonia. As long as Greek politicians insist on their current policies regarding Cyprus, the Turkish Government will not allow Turkish Cypriots to become a minority within a united Cyprus, if Turkey is not a full member of the EU.
- (3) The arguments against Turkey's full membership of the European Union run as follows: Turkey is different in many ways, it is the largest and poorest country ever to be invited to start talks and it is the most culturally challenging. Obviously, Turkey's economic backwardness compared with the EU is one of the main obstacles and it would therefore seem reasonable in the long run for Turkey to follow a double strategy. On the one hand, it should move steadily towards full membership. On the

other, it should accomplish economic integration, including membership of the Monetary Union. It is often forgotten that Turkey's political integration in the EU requires sustainable and stable economic development in the first place –in the spirit of Jean Monnet's concept of political integration through economic integration–. So far, Turkey is the only country to have joined the Customs Union without being full member of the European Union and it shouldered the considerable costs of membership of the Customs Union without the benefit of substantial financial assistance from Brussels.

Conclusions: No one can know today whether Turkey will ever become a member. Who knows what the EU will look like in 15 years' time? Turkey might also take an entirely different course from what is now being predicted. Perhaps the next generation in Turkey might not want to join the EU, even after all the criteria have been fulfilled. However, Turkey should bring its 'Europeanisation process', which officially started in 1839, to its final destination. The success of the struggle for membership will depend on the question of whether Turkey and the European Union are ready to proceed together with resolution in this long and complicated process.